

AOC Grant Program Guidelines

Updated May 2017

Administrative Office of the Courts

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AOC Grant Program Guidelines

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I. Purpose

This document sets forth the requirements of courts seeking grant funding of up to \$50,000 through the AOC Grant Program. Two grant funding sources are available to Nevada trial courts: the USJR grant for projects improving the ability to provide accurate and timely mandatory USJR statistical information to the Nevada Supreme Court, and the Trial Court Improvement (TCI) grant for projects addressing courts' requirements in the areas of technology, security, and court interpreters.

The goal of this document is to provide a vehicle for all Nevada trial courts to compete for the limited funds available in each grant on an equal basis and to ensure grant funding is targeted for approved projects supporting the USJR or TCI efforts.

The following sections of this document identify:

- specific qualifying areas for funding;
- the documentation required of the requesting court for consideration of grant funding;
- the criteria used for selecting projects; and
- the responsibilities of the AOC and the Nevada trial court receiving the grant funding to ensure a successful project completion and fiscal accountability.

These guidelines may seem onerous to many courts, especially for smaller projects, however, in order to prioritize the requests, properly account for the funds, remain neutral and fair to all courts, and maintain the integrity of the grant program, the information is required within the established timeframes.

Requested documentation also helps to ensure all projects are well conceived, documented, and planned. These are basic project management fundamentals known to increase the success rate of funded projects.

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USJR Grant

The 1996 Nevada Legislature authorized funding, which is collected in the form of administrative assessment fees, to be used to create a Uniform System for Judicial Records.¹ The statute states, as amended in 2009, a total of 36.5% of the funds received by the Office of Court Administrator shall be used towards the administration of the courts, “development of a uniform system for judicial records,” and for continuing judicial education. The legislature also assigned the responsibility for the development of the “uniform system for the collecting and compiling statistics and other data regarding the operation of the State Court System” to the Nevada Supreme Court, Administrative Office of the Courts.²

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), with input from Nevada’s trial courts, developed a strategic plan for creating the Uniform System for Judicial Records (USJR) and for advancing the use of technology within the courts. Full implementation of USJR and the advancement of technology in the courts will only be accomplished through the combined efforts of all the courts and the AOC.

TCI Grant

The Trial Court Improvement grant funds projects addressing court order, statutory, or procedural requirements in the areas of technology, security, and court interpreters for Nevada trial courts.

II. Qualifying Areas

A) Uniform System for Judicial Records (USJR)

USJR is defined as:

a system by which statistics and other data regarding the operation of the State Court System are collected, compiled, and transmitted to the Supreme Court.³

¹ NRS 176.059(8)(a)(1)(I-III)

² NRS 1.360(4)

³ NRS 1.360(4)

Qualifying criteria for the allocation of assessment fees distributed to the Office of the Court Administrator for the “development of a uniform system for judicial records”⁴ are listed in priority and include:

1. **Statewide Statistical Systems and Automation Effort:** hardware, software, consulting services and limited term personnel necessary to collect, compile, analyze, and publish statistics of the judicial branch at the state level. Endeavors that provide services to the courts to support their efforts to apply technology to the work of their court as it pertains to the USJR also fall in this category.
2. **Court Automation Systems:** hardware and software that enable a court and Judicial Chambers to:
 - a) manage the cases before it;
 - b) collect and report consistent and accurate USJR information concerning the work of the court; and
 - c) meet minimum statewide information and communication standards.
3. **Data & Information:** hardware, software, consulting services and limited term personnel necessary to provide methods that allow the sharing, transferring and/or protection of data and information between courts within the same jurisdiction, between jurisdictions, between courts and other state and local government agencies, and between courts and the AOC.

Consulting services and limited term personnel directly related to the building, installation, and maintenance of such systems, including hardware and software, under any of the above areas, may also qualify for grant funding.
4. **Other:** hardware, software, and support services necessary to provide ancillary court efficiencies. Such considerations must support one of the other USJR qualifying areas.

⁴ NRS 176.059(8)(a)(1)(II)

Conditions:

Unless the grant request is specifically for the purpose of becoming compliant with the reporting requirements of USJR, the requestor must be current with USJR reporting to the Research and Statistics Unit of the AOC to qualify under the USJR funding stream of the AOC grant program.

Preference is given to projects meeting multiple selection criteria (see next section for point assignment breakout). For example, a request to fund a project to share data electronically as compared to a project that improves the accuracy of the statistical information reported in several areas would result in a preference given to the improvement of the accuracy of the statistical information reported.

B) Trial Court Improvement (TCI)

The Trial Court Improvement grant funds projects addressing court order, statutory, or procedural requirements in the areas of technology, security, and court interpreters for Nevada trial courts.

Preference is given to projects meeting multiple selection criteria. Examples of projects that may be eligible for grant funding under the TCI grant are JAVS systems, security enhancements, and court interpreter credentialing sponsorship.

III. SELECTION CRITERIA

100 possible points are distributed as indicated for each area.

The degree to which the project aligns with the qualifying areas of the requested grant as described in Section II. (15 points maximum)

Statement of the Problem – Understanding of the problem and its importance (20 points maximum)

- a) What problem will the funding resolve?
- b) What is the impact if the funding is not provided?

Project/Program Design and Implementation – (20 points maximum)

- a) Feasibility of proposed project plan.
- b) Awareness of obstacles and risks.

Capabilities/Competencies – (15 points maximum)

- a) Qualifications and experience of proposed staff.
- b) Demonstrated ability of proposed staff and organization to manage the effort.
- c) Adequacy of the plan to manage the project, including how various tasks are subdivided and resources are used.
- d) Successful past performance on USJR/TCI grants (when applicable).

Budget – (10 points maximum)

- a) Total cost of the project relative to the perceived benefit.
- b) Appropriateness of the budget relative to the level of effort.
- c) Use of existing resources to conserve costs.
- d) The availability of financial assistance from other sources for the project.
- e) The ability of the requesting court to provide matching funds according to the schedule below.

Project Total Amount	Cash Match Requirement
\$0 to \$5,000	0%
\$5,001 to \$50,000	30% of total project budget

Example:

A court wants to implement a project with a total cost of \$47,876; the minimum match amount required will be \$11,969, leaving a maximum possible grant request of \$35,907.

- f) The amount of the requesting court's cash match (minimum 30% of total project budget, especially for projects greater than \$5,000).
- g) The level of AOC funding available in the current fiscal year and the amount expected to be available in succeeding fiscal years of requests spanning multiple fiscal years.

Impact/Outcomes and Evaluation – (20 points maximum)

- a) Potential for significant impact on requesting court.
- b) Potential for significant impact on other members of the Nevada Judicial Branch.
- c) The degree to which the results of the project can be transferred to other Nevada courts.
- d) Relevance for improving any of the qualifying areas.
- e) Affordability and cost-effectiveness of proposed effort.

IV. SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

All applications for AOC grant program funding must contain the information identified below. Depending on the size and scope of the project or request, some sections may not be applicable. If a section does not apply, please include the section with the comment “Not Applicable.” All applications must include a cover sheet, a letter of request, a project narrative, a budget, a project schedule, and a signed assurances form.

A) Required documents (documents are available in fillable PDF format via the AOC Grant Program website)

- 1. Grant request cover sheet
 - 2. Letter of request
 - 3. Project narrative
 - 4. Budget
 - 5. Project schedule
 - 6. Assurances
 - 7. Current vendor quote
-
- 1. The **grant request cover sheet** serves as a checklist of required documents for submittal. The intended use is to help the requester ensure all required documents are completed and included in the grant submission packet.
 - 2. The **letter of request** shall contain the following information:

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- a. A title describing the project. If funding is being requested from more than one AOC grant, a clear delineation of the request for each grant must be outlined;
- b. The name and address of the court, organization, or individual submitting the application;
- c. The name, title, address, and telephone number of a contact person who can provide further information about the application;
- d. The estimated time schedule of the proposed project;
- e. The grant for which the request is being made; and
- f. Authorizing signature.

The Judge(s), Chief Judge, or Court Administrator of the requesting court must sign the letter. This signature denotes the proposed project has been approved by the court. If grant funding for the project is approved by the AOC, the authorizing official or specified designee will receive, administer, and be accountable for the awarded funds and project reporting.

3. The **project narrative** should address the specific qualifying area identified in the particular request for grant funds. The project narrative should be thorough, yet brief and should not exceed **eight** pages. The page limit does not include the budget form, the budget narrative, and any appendices containing resumes and letters of cooperation or endorsement. Additional background information may be attached if it is essential to impart a clear understanding of the proposed project. Numerous and lengthy appendices are discouraged.

The project narrative should describe:

- a. Why this project is needed and how it will benefit the requesting court and meet the purpose of the Uniform

System for Judicial Records or Trial Court Improvement

grants: The narrative should include a clear, concise statement of what the proposed project is intended to accomplish. Please remember that AOC TCI and USJR grants are need-based grants. Courts seeking these funds must demonstrate a need for the funding and must explain how these grant funds would alleviate that need.

- b. *Existing situation and problem “As is”*: Explain the current business and technology processes and the issues being addressed and not being addressed by the current “as is” situation.
- c. *Proposed changes and objectives “To be”*: Describe how the new system will address current problems and how it will impact the organization’s policies, procedures, standards, staffing, costs, and funding.
- d. *Tasks and methods*: The narrative should delineate the tasks to be performed in achieving the project objectives and the methods to be used for accomplishing each task, including the anticipated length of the project or grant period.
- e. *How will other Nevada trial courts benefit from the result(s) of this project*: The narrative should describe the degree to which the benefits of the project will be applicable to courts around the state, and whether the results of the project will be disseminated, and, if so, how.
- f. *Other alternatives considered*: Describe alternative solutions, such as equipment, software and communication strategies, considered. Include their strengths and weaknesses, and why the proposed solution was chosen over the alternatives. Additionally, applicants should describe any relevant existing resources and how those resources will be utilized in the completion and/or maintenance of the grant project.

- g. How does this project comply with the grant purpose:
Describe how this project meets either USJR or TCI funding stream requirements.
- h. How will the effects and quality of the project be determined: The application should include a summary description of how the project will be evaluated, including the evaluation criteria.
- i. What obstacles must be overcome for successful implementation of the project: Describe the various obstacles that must be overcome for successful completion.
- j. What risks are associated with the project and what contingencies have been identified to minimize these risks:
Describe the level of risks or factors that pose a potential threat to the success of the project if they occur.

- 4. The **budget** (AOC Grant Program Application Budget Worksheet) and budget narrative must be included with the grant funding request. The budget form must be completed containing the specified information.

The budget narrative must specify the amount of cash matching funds that will be provided.

Note: If applicable, please include **current** vendor quotes to support your budget narrative.

- 5. The **project schedule** should outline the following considerations:
 - a) Phases and timeline
 - i. Provide a description of project milestones and major project phases.
 - ii. The proposal should present a management plan including start and end dates for each major task; the time

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commitments to the project of key staff and their responsibilities regarding each major task; and the methodology that will be used to ensure that all tasks are performed on time, within budget, and at the highest level of quality.

iii. The project management schedule must also provide terms for the timely submission of AOC Grant Program Status Reports (if applicable) and of the AOC Grant Program Final Budget Report Form in accordance with the terms outlined in the grant agreement.

b) Roles and Responsibilities

i. Describe the individual project roles and responsibilities of agency staff and management in both business and technical areas.

ii. If third-party consultants or contractors will be used, include their names, qualifications, selection process, and their project roles and responsibilities.

c) Measurements and Major Deliverables

i. Describe the acceptable levels of achievement for both business and technical objectives of the project.

6. The **assurances** (available via the AOC Grant Program website) must be included with the grant funding request.

B) Submission Timeline

Grant requests must be received between the first business day of July and close of business July 31st (or the following business day if July 31st falls on a non-business day) of each calendar year. Grant applications received after these dates will not be considered. Grant awards are expected to be announced by the end of the calendar year (December 31). The grant will fund projects within the same fiscal year (i.e., a grant request submitted in July of 2017 will be

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approved in the last calendar quarter of 2017 with funding available as soon as January 2018. The use of this funding may span into the next fiscal year depending on the project timeline.

Each application for an AOC grant must include one set of all application sections (Letter of Request, Project Narrative, Application Budget Worksheet, and Project Schedule, and any appendices) with an original signature on the letter of request.

Please send all applications to:

**AOC Grant Program Administrator
Administrative Office of the Courts
201 South Carson Street, Suite 250
Carson City, NV 89701**

Receipt of each proposal will be acknowledged in writing.

V. REVIEW AND APPROVAL PROCESS

AOC grant requests are evaluated competitively against other requests received within the award submission period. AOC is committed to ensuring a fair and open process of awarding grant funds.

Applications are reviewed by the AOC grant review board, made up of AOC grant program administrators and AOC staff experts in the areas of the requests. When necessary, applications may also be reviewed by outside experts.

The AOC grant review board first reviews each request to assess completion of the required documents. The second review evaluates whether the request is reasonable, understandable, achievable, and within the parameters of the qualifying areas of the applicable grant. During this process, grant requests are evaluated and ranked based on several factors, including need and the requester's compliance with reporting requirements from previous grant awards. Courts previously awarded funding must be in compliance with reporting requirements, as provided in their grant agreement, in order to be considered for funding in any future grant cycles.

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When appropriate, preference will be given to applicant courts that have NOT received grant awards in previous grant cycles.

The AOC grant review board will prepare a narrative summary of each application and will compile a rating sheet assigning points for each relevant selection criterion.

The second review results in one of the following recommendations to the Executive Committee:

- a. Fund as requested,
- b. Fund with amendment, or
- c. Deny funding

The recommendation is submitted in writing to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee is made up of three Nevada Supreme Court Justices. The decision of the Executive Committee is forwarded to the appropriate AOC Grant Program Administrator who then notifies the requester.

The AOC Grant Program Administrator will send written notice to each applicant concerning decisions to approve, conditionally approve, defer, or deny funding of their projects and the key issues and questions that were raised during the review process. A decision to deny funding of a project may not be appealed, but does not prohibit resubmission of a similar proposal in a subsequent year of funding.

If conditionally approved or if additional information is needed, a notice requesting the additional information will be sent to the requesting court. Courts have until the date indicated in the notice to respond with the information or provide any requested revisions. If the requested revisions (or a reasonable schedule for submitting such revisions) have not been received by the date indicated in the notice, the conditional approval will be reconsidered and may be deferred or denied.

Approvals are based on available funding. The approved grant award may be made for an amount other than the amount requested. Once a request is approved, an agreement is prepared and forwarded to the requester for signature.

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The requester is asked to produce an original copy of the agreement, obtain authorized signature, and return to the AOC Grant Program Administrator for signature by the AOC Director. A conformed copy is returned to the requester.

VI. RESPONSIBILITIES

The responsibilities of the Nevada Supreme Court, Administrative Office of the Courts, in relation to this grant are to:

1. Oversee expenditure of all state funds, administrative assessment fees, and/or preemptory challenge fees designated to the purpose of the AOC grant program.
2. Set standards for the disbursement of equipment, software, and funds to the courts in meeting the purpose of the AOC grant program.
3. Set statewide judicial branch statistical reporting requirements including information standards (data elements and definitions) for all trial courts.
4. Set statewide communication standards to assure all courts can electronically transfer case information to the Department of Motor Vehicles and Public Safety's criminal history repository, the AOC, and other courts.
5. Perform analysis and publish pertinent statewide judicial information.

The responsibilities of the local court receiving the grant are to:

1. Design and purchase systems that meet established state judicial branch approved standards.
2. Diligently manage state equipment, software, and funds provided to support the AOC grant program.
3. Include in any contractor agreement the need for contractor to submit invoices within 30 days of work completion.
4. Provide project status and budget reports to the AOC Grant Administrator throughout the project time period in accordance with the terms outlined in the Grant Agreement. The AOC Grant Program

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Status Report Form and the AOC Final Budget Report Form are available on the AOC Grant Program website.

5. Make every effort to provide accurate, timely, consistent judicial information to all necessary state and local agencies according to Supreme Court information standards.
6. Provide a final narrative report of project completion in accordance with the terms outlined in the Grant Agreement. This report should be a comprehensive overview of the project. The final report should be thorough, yet brief, and may not exceed 2 pages; receipts for the project should be included with the final report. Additionally, the AOC Grant Program Final Budget Report Form (available via the AOC Grant Program website) should also be included in the submission.
7. Ensure that grant projects are completed thoroughly and in accordance with both the grant agreement and with the project narrative for which funding was awarded. Absent extenuating circumstances, and written approval from the State Court Administrator, funding must be used for the purposes presented in the grant application or be returned to the AOC.
8. Keep in mind that grant funds must be awarded and expended by the end of the grant cycle (June 30, 2018).

NOTE: *If the project is transferable to other courts, include a plan on how the results of the project will be disseminated beyond the court and individuals directly affected by the project. The plan should identify the specific methods that will be used to inform interested parties about the project, such as a journal article or the distribution of key materials. A statement that a report or research findings “will be made available” is not sufficient. The specific means of distribution or dissemination as well as the types of recipients should be identified. Reproduction and dissemination costs are allowable budget items.*